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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine teacher perceptions regarding reading selection policy in their schools. A survey was mailed to a random sample of 342 elementary and middle public school teachers in Virginia during Fall 1989. A similar survey had already been conducted with public school superintendents and private school headmasters. The survey included three questions regarding reading policies on recommended and required reading lists and asked for information about teachers' perceived role in the selection of recommended and required readings. One hundred seventy-nine questionnaires were returned. Findings indicated that the majority of administrators and teachers agreed there was no policy or list of recommended or required readings. A substantial number of teachers responded "do not know" when asked if teachers in their school had an opportunity to select required and recommended readings. Results were in agreement with similar studies which reported that teachers want greater decision-making responsibilities when it comes to selecting required reading. (Three tables of data are included.) (MG)

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A Descriptive Study of Teacher Perceptions Regarding Reading Selection Policy

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INTRODUCTION

An interview conducted by one of the researchers with a state education department official in Richmond, Virginia revealed that there were no lists of required or recommended readings and that there would be philosophical concerns with the creation of such lists. It was also determined that the state legislature created House Resolution 300 which gave local school boards in Virginia responsibility for reading selections. More specifically, 66% of these school Boards have a selection policy concerning library materials that calls for the involvement of principals, teachers, supervisors, media specialist and students in the selection process. However, the final decision for purchase of library materials lies with the "media center personnel."

There are over 40,000 children's books and researchers are in agreement concerning the need for selection policies (Huck et al., 1987). Indeed, Criscuolo (1982) discussed strategies to deal with censorship activities which included the establishment of a written selection policy; the involvement of parents in textbook adoption; and teacher-librarian collaboration in book selection. Purves and Monson (1984) asserted that the classroom teacher is in the best position concerning decisions about reading selections that are most suitable for children. Norton (1987) advocated the compilation of recommended book lists by empathetic and knowledgeable teachers.

METHOD

A survey concerned with demographic data and reading policies was mailed to public school superintendents and private school headmasters in all the districts and counties of Virginia during the Fall, 1988. A cover letter stated the purpose of the study and requested that an appropriate administrator (e.g., Assistant Superintendent, Reading Coordinator) respond to the questionnaire. Part I of the survey requested information regarding present position, number of years in present position, as well as type and size of school district. Part II consisted of three questions regarding reading policies on recommended and required reading lists. Administrators were asked to return the survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. Of the 320 surveys mailed to these school officials, 208 usable surveys were returned which represented a 65% return rate. The results of the survey have been presented by Brittain et al. (1989).

A second survey was directly mailed to a random sample of 342 elementary and middle public school teachers in Virginia during the Fall, 1989. Teachers were asked to respond to the same questions asked of administrators as well as provide information about their perceived role in the selection of recommended and required readings. Of the 342 public school teachers surveyed, 179 questionnaires were returned in the self-addressed stamped envelop and represented a 52% return rate. It is the teacher survey results which we turn to next.

RESULTS

The data in Table 1 indicate that of the 179 public school teachers responding to the question concerning recommended and required reading policy, 50% say there is no such policy.

Insert Table 1 here

When asked if their school provided a list of recommended reading, 41% said yes, 39% said no, 12% did not know and 8% had another or no response.

When asked if their school provided a list of required reading, 15% said yes, 68% said no, 12 did not know and 5% had another or no response.

Insert Table 2 here

The perceived opportunity for teachers to select recommended and required readings and the extent they would want to participate in the selection process was assessed by means of a Likert scale (Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, Never). Teachers were also given the option of responding "Do not know."

Insert Table 3 here

The data in Table 3 indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between teachers' perceived opportunity

to select recommended readings and their desire to do so. However, a statistically significant difference was obtained, by means of the Sign Test, between perceived opportunity for teachers to select required readings and their desire to do so ($S_{.1} \leq 6$, $p = .001$). The perceived opportunity for teachers to select required readings in their schools was significantly less than their desire to do so.

DISCUSSION

It appears from the Public School Administrator survey results (Brittain et al., 1989) as well as the Teacher survey that there is no policy regarding recommended or required reading. Futhermore, the majority of administrators and teachers agree that there are no recommended or required reading lists.

Teachers who responded to the questions concerning their perceptions of opportunity to select recommended and required readings as well as their desire to do so reported no difference for recommended readings. However, they perceived less opportunity to select required readings. A substantial number of teachers responded "Do not know" when asked if teachers in their school have an opportunity to select required and recommended readings. Of the 179 teachers responding to this question, 107 did not know about required readings and 75 did not know about recommended readings. Perhaps it was the way the question was phrased as well as providing teachers with the "Do not know" option.

The results, however, are in agreement with Elam's (1989) second Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa national survey of teacher attitudes as well as Gansneder and Duke (1989). Both studies reported

that teachers want greater decision-making responsibilites when it comes to selecting required reading i.e., textbooks.

There has been much talk about giving teachers more decision-making authority (e.g., Barth 1988) as well as responsibility for what goes on in the schools. Teachers do, in fact, have the responsiblity and autonomy to make instructional decisions in their classrooms. They are, according to Rallis (1988), in the best position to link educational policy with practice.

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Table 1. Percentage of Teachers (N=179) Indicating Existence of Policy Regarding Recommended/ Required Reading

	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Response
Existence of Policy	27	50	19	4

Table 2. Percentage of Teachers (N=179) Indicating Existence of Recommended/Required Reading Lists

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Other/ No Response
RECOMMENDED	41	39	12	8
REQUIRED	15	68	12	5

Table 3. Number of Teachers Indicating Perceived Opportunity To Select Recommended/Required Readings vs Desire To Do So

	RECOMMENDED	*REQUIRED
Opportunity > Desire	21	6
Opportunity = Desire	56	36
Opportunity < Desire	27	25

* $S_{\exists 1} \leq 6$, $p = .001$